

Covid-19 Vaccine Info Sharing

Who we are & why we're writing

We hope that you are finding warmth and wellness as we move into this new year. Recently, a committee within CADBI that includes health care and public health workers has been working to understand how and when vaccines for COVID-19 will become available to folks incarcerated and working in Pennsylvania prisons.

We know that there is a lot of concern and skepticism about the COVID-19 vaccines. The US medical system has a brutal, racist history of medical experimentation on incarcerated people, women and people of color. Many of us on the inside and the outside have experienced direct physical harm due to both medical neglect and inappropriate medical treatment.

We are facing a virus with few effective treatments available and that has threatened the health and lives of people in general and incarcerated people in particular. While we don't currently have a clear picture of when the vaccine will become available to people in prison and how it will be distributed, we would like to provide some information about the vaccines so that you can make an informed choice about vaccination when it becomes available. **Based on all available evidence and the immediate and significant dangers of COVID-19, the members of this CADBI working group strongly recommend getting the vaccine as soon as it becomes available.**

How the vaccines work in your body

Vaccines work by teaching your immune system to recognize and kill a specific virus. Many vaccines contain a weakened or dead virus, but the two COVID-19 vaccines do not contain a virus at all. They use mRNA instead. This is a small piece of genetic code that teaches the immune system to recognize the virus that causes COVID-19. Once the mRNA is processed by your immune cells, it is destroyed by your body. Your body then "remembers" how to recognize and kill the virus, so when you come in contact with the virus, your immune system can kill it before you become sick.

To build full protection, the current vaccines require two shots, 3-4 weeks apart. Those being vaccinated should receive two doses of the same vaccine (either Moderna or Pfizer). After receiving the vaccine, some people experience mild symptoms like soreness or fatigue, which are normal signs that your immune system is building protection. These side effects are not COVID-19, and will not cause you to test positive if you are tested afterward.

How to reach the CADBI COVID-19 Vaccine Working Group

We will continue to work to understand the vaccines and how they will be distributed to folks inside prisons and jails. As we learn more, we will continue to keep you updated. We also want to be here to answer questions and address concerns. You can write to us at PO Box 4634 Phila 19127. For a quicker response you can have a loved one email us at CADBI.COVID19@gmail.com to request to have your name added to our Connect Network.

How vaccines are developed

Two COVID-19 vaccines -- the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines -- have so far been approved by the FDA, and are currently being administered to health care providers and other essential workers across the country. Others are still being developed. Both vaccines were created based on substantial research, and both were determined to be safe and effective through clinical trials. Each trial included 30,000-40,000 volunteers -- half of whom were given the vaccine, half of whom were a comparison group. Both vaccines were found to prevent COVID-19 in about 95% of people who received it. All clinical trial participants were monitored for side effects, and there is no evidence that the vaccine is dangerous. These trials meet extremely high ethical and scientific standards

-- standards which have been shaped by activists, in response to past ethical and safety issues in medical research. Detailed information about the clinical trials is publicly available, and scientists are continuing to monitor the vaccines' safety and effectiveness

Because younger children were not included in the first clinical trials, the COVID-19 vaccines are currently approved for people over 18 (Moderna) or over 16 (Pfizer) years old. You can get the COVID-19 vaccine even if you have already had COVID. We've recently learned about a new "strain" of COVID-19. Experts believe the vaccine will also be effective for this strain, and will continue to study it as the vaccines are distributed. These vaccines were developed quickly because there was a lot of funding and resources devoted to this research.

After reading this information about the vaccine, one incarcerated member reflected, "Because I learned that the vaccine is NOT a weak strain of the virus, I was able to explain this to my cellmate and others. Debating or engaging in healthy, friendly dialogue stimulates thought, shares ideas & motivates people to hopefully broaden their information & dispel their false beliefs. At least that's what it does for me." We hope that you, too, will find this information helpful, and share it with others who may benefit from it. Sending much love and solidarity across the walls,

CADBI COVID-19 Vaccine Working Group

Support for the vaccine

Black Physician Jubril Oyeyemi, MD, wrote in the Philadelphia Inquirer this December: "While our skepticism and distrust of the establishment is understandable, the COVID-19 vaccine is different. We are not being experimented on, and we are neither the first nor the only ones to receive it. Of the 40,000 people in the Pfizer vaccine trial, there were 16,775 people of color (of whom 3,492 were Black) in the study already done. The 95% efficacy of the vaccine was seen in us, too. More importantly, the vaccine was just as safe for those 16,775 people of color as it was for white study participants."

Dr. Ala Stanford, founder of the Black Doctors' Covid-19 Consortium and member of the Philadelphia Vaccine Advisory Committee, said this to MSNBC while explaining her decision to get the vaccine: "The experience that African Americans have had with the healthcare system being untrustworthy to them, [...] I know the history, but we cannot allow that to impede us from receiving the help that is on the way."

The National Medical Association, the nation's largest organization for Black doctors, convened a task force to evaluate the safety of the vaccines. They released a statement on Dec. 21 fully supporting the FDA's approval of the Covid-19 vaccines and encouraging an equitable distribution of the vaccine to help close gaps in health outcomes.